The World of Letters as Others See It

The French Ambassador.

M. JUSSERAND, who has formally denied the report that he is resigning his post as French Ambassador at Washington, stood in high favor with Roosevelt. In a letter written during his Presidency, Roosevelt remarks: "Jusserand is one of the best fellows I ever met." M. Jusserand's extensive knowledge of our literature inspired one of Canon Ainger's happiest epigrams. After he had reviewed "The English Novel Before Shakespeare" Ainger wrote to a friend: "What an excellent and readable book it is! I used to say of another French critic

Our English critics their dull wits keep straining,
When—enter Taine! And all is entertaining.

But the epigram would be truer if it could be adapted to Jusserand—

A Frenchman straying into English fields
Of letters seldom has a *locus standi;*
But if there's one to whom objection yields,
'Tis Jusserand—he has the *jus errandi.*"

—*From the Manchester Guardian.*

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A Briton on "Main Street."

I HAVE not found the inhabitants of these small towns fairly represented by those of Gopher Prairie in "Main Street," although some of the more enlightened of them have told me that they themselves do recognize truth in that picture. If they recognize it as true in any respect, its effect upon their future may be beneficial. I think that the chief fault of "Main Street" is that it takes the pettiness of life for granted, and makes you feel that the only possible thing is to escape from it. But that is not how I feel about the reality. Many of the people who live in these towns are of good education, and I have met not a few men of mark in the cities whose early life was spent in one of them. I mean men of culture and character, and not only men who have been successful in business. Those who remain behind are not as a rule people of any wide outlook, and perhaps never will be. A small town is a small town, and where it is many hours journey from the nearest city it is bound to impose a certain narrowness. But the potentialities for a wider outlook than at present obtains are there. People do read—more widely, I think, than the corresponding class in England. They welcome lectures from the Chautauquas and other organizations which provide them. If these do not carry them very far, the demand for them shows that there is fruitful soil to work upon.—*By Archibald Marshall in the North American Review.*

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Shakespeare and the Mob.

WE know that Shakespeare detested the city mob. If we care to know why we have only to exercise a little imagination and picture to ourselves the finest creative spirit in the world acting in his own plays before a pitful of base mechanicals.

Alas, 'tis true, I have gone here and there
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear.

The man who used that terrible phrase, who "gored his own thoughts" to bring shillings from the pockets of the greasy, grinning crowd in front of him, had no cause to love them; and Shakespeare did not. He was an aristocrat, not in the political sense; but as every man of fine mind who shrinks from contact with the coarse minded is an aristocrat, as Anton Tchehov was an aristocrat when he wrote: "Alas, I shall never be a Tolstoyan! In women I love beauty above all things, and in the history of mankind, culture expressed in carpets, spring carriages and keenness of wit.'—*From "A Neglected Heroine of Shakespeare." By J. Middleton Murry in the London Mercury.*

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Dickens's First Schoolmaster.

THE reference in "Miscellany" to Mr. Giles of Chatham recalls the interesting fact that Dickens's first schoolmaster, in later years, was closely associated with religious and educational work in Lancashire. In 1832 he became the minister of a Baptist church in Preston. His stay, however, was short and after a brief sojourn in Liverpool he appears to have quitted the ministry, for in 1834 he was conducting Barton Hall School, Patricroft. In the Manchester *Guardian* of January 4, 1834, there is an illustrated advertisement of this establishment and a note saying that prospectuses "may be obtained at the office of this paper." Among an imposing list of "references" there appears the name of "D. Grant, Esq., Mosley Street," whom, curiously enough, Dickens five years later idealized and immortalized as one of the famous Cheeryble Brothers in "Nicholas Nickleby."—*From the Manchester Guardian.*

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Reading and Rereading.

LIKE everybody, I have read some plays of Shakespeare innumerable times. But of whole books in the ordinary sense, I can think of only three that I have read more than once:—"Vanity Fair," "Treasure Island," and Boswell's "Life of Johnson." This last book I had lying around on my table, the first time I read it, for three or four years. It seemed to me like a few grains of wheat in whole measures of chaff. The second time I read it more consecutively and more rapidly. So far as I know my memory has been enriched by only one gem from this double reading, but that gem is a real one. It is that of the conversation in which Boswell remarked that Sheridan was naturally dull. "Well," said Johnson thoughtfully, "Sherry is naturally dull. But he must have attained his present state of dullness by persistent effort. For such dullness as he now displays is quite beyond nature."—*From "The Buying of Books." By Carl S. Patton in the Atlantic Monthly.*

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Shakespeare Survives.

IS it, then, true that "at no time in our literary history was the English public, as represented by its critics and leaders of taste, less qualified to admire and celebrate William Shakespeare?" Is it true that never before has his fame been "so low or so confused"? My own answer would be that never before have Shakespeare's critics been so generally enlightened, his essential potencies so clearly felt, his fame so secure, and his contemporaneity so obvious And this good fortune arises in large measure, I think, from the fact that in these times the readers of his plays are more directly fixing their attention where Shakespeare certainly fixed his. If we are losing interest in those vexed inquiries as to when Macbeth first conceived the murder, why *Emilia* was silent about the handkerchief, and why *Hamlet* pretended madness, we are the more direct and ardent in our attention to *Macbeth, Desdemona* and *Hamlet* themselves. I venture to believe that the informed reader is giving himself more artlessly to the thought, the utterance, the poetry, the crisis of emotion and insight—those moments when the play disappears and we dwell for brief instants in the presence of life itself. This reader, I take it, is more willingly, and less fearfully, taking counsel of the school for which Mr. Shaw speaks when he advises us "to dissect out the absurd sensational incidents of the borrowed story from the genuine Shakespearian tissue." I shall not boast that our generation is the first to discern "the genuine Shakespearian tissue." My impression is, however, that the teachers and critics of our time will fall below their privilege if from the labors of the skeptic they do not derive means for delivering the general reader from the delusion that all things in Shakespeare are excellent, and, more, particularly, that Shakespeare is a flawless *artist.*—*By Karl Young in the North American Review.*

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A Picture of Henry James.

BUT, then, James was more than most authors. And a little while after, I ran into him in Macmillan's office in London, and he asked me to lunch at his flat in De Vere Gardens. I remember it was hot, and James was standing in a red undershirt before a high writing desk in a dark room, which wasn't exactly the usual idea of him. And I remember, too, that he told me he was settling Daumier in his place in the art world by the article he was writing; and I, with one of those inspired bursts of cheek which come to one sometimes, told him that he was not able to do so. I remember that he was somewhat surprised.—*From "Adventures of an Illustrator." By Joseph Pennell in the "Century."*

As Clemens Saw Harte.

BRET HARTE was one of the pleasantest men I have ever known. He was also one of the unpleasantest men I have ever known. He was showy, meretricious, insincere; and he constantly advertised these qualities in his dress. He was distinctly pretty, in spite of the fact that his face was badly pitted with smallpox. In the days when he could afford it—and in the days when he couldn't—his clothes always exceeded the fashion by a shade or two. He was always conspicuously a little more intensely fashionable than the fashionablest of the rest of the community. He had good taste in clothes. With all his conspicuousness there was never anything really loud or offensive about them. They always had a single smart little accent, effectively located, and that accent would have distinguished Harte from any other of the ultra-fashionables. Oftenest it was his necktie. Always it was of a single color, and intense. Most frequently, perhaps, it was crimson—a flash of flame under his chin; or it was indigo blue, and as hot and vivid as if one of those splendid and luminous Brazilian butterflies had lighted there. Harte's dainty self-complacencies extended to his carriage and gait. His carriage was graceful and easy; his gait was of the mincing sort, but was the right gait for him.

I knew him intimately in the days when he was private secretary on the second floor and I a fading and perishing reporter on the third, with Smiggy McGlural looming doomfully in the near distance. I knew him intimately when he came East five years later, in 1870, to take the editorship of the proposed *Lakeside Magazine*, Chicago, and crossed the continent through such a prodigious blaze of national interest and excitement that one might have supposed he was the Viceroy of India on a progress, or Halley's comet come again after seventy-five years of lamented absence.

I knew him pretty intimately thenceforth until he crossed the ocean to be Consul, first at Crefeld, in Germany, and afterward in Glasgow. He never returned to America.—*From "Mark Twain's Autobiography" in Harper's Magazine.*

The Book Factory

By EDWARD ANTHONY.

THE TRUTHFUL BLURB

Some blurbs are unconsciously true;
here is one
That says, "This romance by Sir
Plunk
Is as worthy a thing as this author
has done."

Which means that the story is punk.

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"WILL SHAKESPEARE."

According to the Reviewers' Handbook (sec. 187, par. 19), in reviewing a provocative volume such as Clemence Dane's play, "Will Shakespeare," you are supposed to begin with this paragraph:

As much as one may resent—and one does—the liberties the author has taken, one is forced to concede the originality and power of the work.

We are quite willing to say that about "Will Shakespeare"; it is as original, forceful and interesting a product as has come off the presses this year.

(At this point the Reviewers' Handbook declares that a sentence beginning with "but" is essential.)

But—(for who are we to bust a perfectly good tradition?)—it seems to us that Miss Dane has taken more liberties with poor old Will than Gertrude Stein takes with the rules of prosody.

Years ago we read that Shakespeare, as a boy, used to steal apples from Sir Thomas Lucy's orchard in Stratford. Perhaps Miss Dane read this too and decided that a boy who started this way would wind up as a murderer some day. At any rate, she makes him one—and a liar and philanderer besides. We are willing to accept the philandering part, but we don't think Bill lied except in his poems to ladies (and all poets do that). As for murdering, he was too busy killing off people in his plays that he didn't have time to dispatch any in real life.

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First stanza of a "Bad Bill Shakespeare" ballad, to be written as soon as we have the time:

Unless poor Will has been slandered
His virtues (poor fellow!) were
few;
He lied like the deuce and philandered,
And frequently murdered, too.

Strictly up-to-date line from "Will Shakespeare," page 149: *"Shut up now and let the kid sing it!"*

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VERS AMERICAIN VS. AMERICAN POME.

What he considers an honest-to-goodness American poem is characterized by Mr. H. L. Mencken, the well known discoverer of the American language, as a *vers Americain*, and we hope that no uncouth user of that tongue will have the irreverence, if he should happen to run across that affected Frenchism in the Baltimore sage's "The American Language," to ask, in the said American language, "Vois Amerikane?—whatzat, for the love o' Mike?"

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HERGESHEIMER'S "CYTHEREA"

One critic said, "The liquor flows
Too freely in this tome;
To boozy tales I'll not expose
My home."

Another found the leggy plot
A sorry legacy,
And, shudd'ring piously, cried, "Not
For me!"

Another wore a peevish pout
Because (there were a hundred
sich)
The author went and wrote about
The rich.

Still others claimed the dolly snare
That wrecked the hero's Paradise
Was but a *dollerably* fair
Device. . . .

You *made* me read it, you consarned
Old cavilers; so, darlings, I'm
A-thanking you. I had a darned
Good time!

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IN WHICH IT IS QUITE PLAINLY SHOWN JAPANGS OF HUNGER AREN'T KNOWN.

The always entertaining Julian Street in his delightful "Mysterious Japan" (*Doubleday, Page & Co.*) writes of a dinner he had at a Japanese club. "I ate too much of the first few courses," he says, "and as a result found myself unable to partake of the last two-thirds of the feast. The amount of food was simply stupendous. I might have realized this in advance and governed myself accordingly had I looked at the menu. But," he continues, and from what he says it would seem that the Nippon appetite—or the Jappetite, as one might call it—is an insatiable one, "I failed to do so until driven to it by my surprise as course after course was served. This was the bill of fare:

FIRST TABLE.
Hors d'Oeuvres. Vegetables.
Soup—Terrapin With Quail, Eggs and Onions.
Baked Fish With Sea Hedgehog Paste.
Raw Fish With Horse Radish and Eutrema Root.
Fried Prawns and Deep Sea Eels.
Duck, Fishcake and Vegetables in Egg Soup, Steamed.
Roast Duck With Relishes.

"When this much had been served the *nesans* took up the little tables from in front of us and went trooping out of the room. As I had already eaten what amounted to about three normal dinners I concluded that the meal was over, but not so. In they came again bearing other little lacquered tables of the same pattern as the first, but slightly smaller; whereupon, as it seemed to me, an entire second luncheon was served. The menu was as follows:

SECOND TABLE.
Hors d'Oeuvres. Vegetables.
Fish Consomme.
Grilled Eels.
Rice.
Pickled Vegetables.
Fruits.

"I am told that indigestion is a prevalent ailment of the Japanese."

• • •

And yet we have never seen a stout Japanese. Perhaps the reason is that we have never met any of the *daimyos*, or feudal lords, the gentlemen who partake of these sumptuous repasts. These foodal lords, as one might call them, are, we understand, the only folks in fair Nippon whose Japantries are shelved with groaning boards. The rest of the population lives on tea, rice and Japancakes.

One of the things Mr. Street does not mention in his comprehensive volume is the matter of table implements. We bring up this point because we don't see how any one can cut raw fish (*see menu*) with an ordinary knife. Have you ever tried it? We have. It is hard work. Perhaps the lord of the manor passes around his sword for this purpose. Or maybe each guest is furnished with a fish cutting Nipponiard.

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"Mysterious Japan" is one of the most diverting volumes we have read in months; there isn't a dull page. Reviewers have a habit of acclaiming a good travel book with phrases like, "It is as enthralling as good fiction." Well, the next time we want to praise a good work of fiction we're going to say, "It is as entertaining as a travel book by Julian Street."

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And, speaking of good travel books, there's Harry Franck's "Working North From Patagonia." It's a peach of a volume. One of these days we're going to toss it a rimed bouquet. We wrote the verses weeks ago, but something has always crowded 'em out. . . . Be patient, gentle reader. Don't coax us so! *Honest,* we'll run 'em soon.

• • •

RONDEAU

A lovely flow of words designed
To please the ear I am inclined
To welcome, thankful that they dwell
On nothing. Thought's a bagatelle!
Down with the thinker and his kind!

The jargon of the thinking mind
With jarring facts is intertwined.
In writing naught can parallel
A lovely flow.
Sing to the weary undersigned
From tuneful Swinburne! They've maligned
You, Algy, but I love you well,
As does a certain demoiselle,
Who, could you meet her, you would find
A lovely Flo!

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The *Book Factory*, a veritable vitamine of information, has discovered what it is that makes the moon rise. Here——(the lines, except for a slight alteration of ours, are Walt Whitman's) are our findings:

Lo! the moon ascending
Up from the yeast!

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The other day a linotyper on The *Sun*, as a result, doubtless, of having heard that Hergesheimer's new novel is full of legs and wine, changed the title of the book to "Cyntherea."

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Although we are second to none in our admiration for little Hilda Conkling, we think it appropriate, since seven or eight years must elapse before she attains her majority, to refer to the youngster as a——

• • •

Miner poet.